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SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE MID-TERM ELECTIONS: OVERALL WIN FOR ARROYO

Ref: MANILA 1694 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) Summary and comment. The Arroyo Administration's coalition scored an overall victory in the May 14 mid-term elections, winning at least 195 seats in the 220 House of Representatives. It also retained control at the local government level, winning 72 of 81 gubernatorial seats and 102 of 118 city mayoral seats. However, it apparently lost heavily in the Senate race, probably gaining only two of the 12 vacant seats. The results in the House constitute a fatal blow to further opposition attempts to unseat the President through impeachment. Administration dominance at the local government level assures grassroots support for the President's economic programs. However, the opposition's continued domination of the Senate will allow it to check the Administration, likely often frustrating the President's legislative agenda. In Maguindanao Province, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) suspended the tabulation of certificates of canvas amid allegations of widespread cheating.

¶2. (SBU) As in the past, the Philippine elections were messy and often violent, but civil society monitoring groups played a welcome and active role in ensuring fairer counts. Their results are remarkably similar to those of the COMELEC for virtually all races. The apparent sweep by the Opposition in the Senate races arguably demonstrates the fundamental fairness of the elections despite irregularities. There is nonetheless widespread agreement that the COMELEC should make significant and tangible progress toward automated transmission of results in time for the 2010 elections. End summary and comment.

Administration Coalition Retains House

¶3. (U) As of May 30, the Arroyo Administration's coalition had garnered at least 195 of the 220 Congressional district seats. The number could go higher, with 15 seats still under contest. Ruling party Lakas won at least 92 seats. Administration allies Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (KAMPI) or Partners of the Free Filipino --- President Arroyo's own political party -- won at least 47 seats; Nationalist People's Coalition, 28; Liberal Party, 21, and two other smaller parties, 7 seats. The opposition has won only 10 seats so far. Given these numbers, Liberal Party chief and former Senate President Drilon publicly conceded that any impeachment attempt against the President - which requires a 1/3 vote (79 members) in the House for transmittal to the Senate - will be almost impossible to succeed.

KAMPI Representative to Challenge de Venecia?

¶4. (U) Topping the list of Administration winners is Pangasinan Fourth District Representative and Lakas Party President and incumbent House Speaker Jose de Venecia who, banking on multi-party support, has expressed confidence that he will retain the Speakership for an unprecedented fifth term, despite a credible

challenge by newly-elected Cebu Representative and former Cebu Governor Pablo Garcia. Camarines Sur Representative and KAMPI President Luis Villafuerte announced a plan to challenge de Venecia after a recent caucus of this second biggest political party, but Malacanang sources have distanced the President from any effort to replace de Venecia.

First Family Goes Undefeated

15. (U) The First Family was highly successful in these elections. First Son Juan Miguel "Mikey" won re-election as Second District representative in Pampanga. Son Diosdado Ignacio "Dato" won his first bid at politics as representative of Camarines Sur Province's First District. Ignacio Arroyo, brother of First Gentleman Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo, won re-election as Fifth District representative of Negros Occidental Province.

Cabinet Members' Relatives Also Succeed

16. (U) Cabinet members' relatives also did well. Roman Romulo, lawyer-son of Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo, won in his second attempt at a Congressional seat in Pasig City. Representative Elenita Ermita-Buhain, daughter of Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, won re-election in the First District of

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Batangas, although it appears her brother Edwin failed in his bid for the vice gubernatorial seat in the province. Political neophyte Mark Leandro "Dong" Mendoza, son of Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza, won the Fourth District seat in Batangas, while Jesi Lopus, younger brother of Education Secretary Jesli Lopus, won his brother's former seat as representative of the Third District of Tarlac. Pryde Henry Teves, nephew of Finance Secretary Gary Teves, replaced grandfather Hermino Teves as Negros Oriental's Third

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District representative. Trinidad Apostol, wife of Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Sergio Apostol, won re-election as Leyte's Second District representative. Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez' son, Raul Jr., won re-election as Iloilo City representative.

Opposition To Dominate Senate

17. (U) As of May 30, the COMELEC had counted 87% of the certificates of canvass nationwide for the Senate and party-list races but had not yet formally proclaimed any of the 12 Senate victors. Partial official results are generally consistent with pre-election and exit poll surveys, which placed the opposition in the lead. So far, eight "Genuine Opposition" (GO), two pro-Administration "Team Unity" (TU), and two independent candidates appear poised to win the 12 available Senate seats. Former Senator Loren Legarda apparently garnered the highest number of votes, with 16.5 million so far. The rank order so far for the top 12 candidates nationwide are:

- Loren Legarda (GO)
- Francis Escudero (GO)
- Panfilo Lacson (GO)
- Manuel Villar, Jr. (GO)
- Francis Pangilinan (Ind)
- Benigno Aquino III (GO)
- Edgardo Angara (TU)
- Joker Arroyo (TU)
- Alan Peter Cayetano (GO)
- Gregorio Honasan (Ind)
- Antonio Trillanes (GO)
- Aquilino Pimentel III (GO)

TU Candidates Still in the Running

18. (U) TU Senate candidates Miguel Zubiri and Ralph Recto are still

in the running for the "Magic 12," pending final tabulation of votes from Mindanao, but TU candidate Michael Defensor (former Presidential Chief of Staff and Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources) conceded defeat on May 30.

Metro Manila a Mixed Bag

¶9. (U) Opposition Mayor Jejomar "Jojo" Binay won a land-slide re-election in Makati City against challenger and incumbent Senator "Lito" Lapid, who will resume his Senate seat for the remaining three years of his six-year term. Also, opposition lawyer-journalist Teodoro "Teddyboy" Locsin, Jr. won a third term as First District representative in Makati. Opposition Senator Alfredo Lim won the mayorship of the city Manila, regaining the post he held before entering the Senate. This will leave two Senate seats vacant until 2010, given the unlikelihood of special nationwide elections to fill Lim's and Vice President Noli de Castro's spots. There will thus be only 22 Senators (out of a possible 24) for the next three years.

¶10. (U) Independent Las Pinas City Representative Cynthia Aguilar Villar -- wife of winning incumbent Senator Manuel Villar -- won a third term, while brother Vergel Aguilar won re-election as mayor. In San Juan City, former President Estrada's son Joseph Victor "JV" Ejercito, running with the opposition, won a third and final term as mayor, while opposition Congressman Ronaldo Zamora won re-election.

¶11. (U) Mandaluyong City's Benjamin Abalos Jr., son of COMELEC Chairman Benjamin Abalos, and Neptali Gonzalez II are back as mayor and representative, respectively, after temporarily warming each other's seats after reaching term limits in 2004. All incumbent key officials in Quezon City won re-election, including former House Speaker and incumbent Mayor Feliciano Belmonte and Representative Matias Defensor, father of failed TU senatorial candidate Mike Defensor. Sherwin and Rexlon Gatchalian, sons of Estrada crony William Gatchalian, won as mayor and First District representative, respectively, of Valenzuela City. A third son lost to returning representative lawyer Magtanggol Gunigundo III in the Second District. The latter is the son of former Presidential Commission on Good Government Chairman Magtanggol Gunigundo, who served during the Ramos Administration.

Winning Party-List Organizations

¶12. (U) As of May 30, 16 party-list organizations have garnered the minimum two percent nationwide vote required for a seat in Congress. At least six of these parties are clearly anti-Administration, including: pro-life BUHAY, 8.57 percent of the total vote; leftist

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Bayan Muna, 6.65 percent; anti-corruption CIBAC, 5.49 percent; militant pro-women Gabriela, 3.85 percent; leftist AKBAYAN, 2.89 percent; militant labor group Anak Pawis, 2.46 percent. Should these numbers hold, they would account for 11 anti-Administration representatives. Ten other organizations are poised to win party-list seats, but none are publicly identified as overtly pro- or anti-Administration. These parties are: electric cooperatives group APEC, 3.84 percent; farmers' group BUTIL, 3.52 percent, pro-poor ALAGAD, 3.42 percent; A TEACHER, 3.35 percent; agricultural group ABONO, 2.90 percent; agricultural group AGAP, 2.63 percent; new citizen advocacy group BATAS, 2.63; Alliance of Rural Concerns (ARC), 2.42 percent; Cooperative-National Confederation Network Party (COOP-NATCO), 2.34 percent; and Visayan organization An Waray, 2.13 percent. Under the party-list system, an organization may have a maximum of three seats in Congress, at two percent votes nationwide per seat. So far, only BUHAY and Bayan Muna will likely each get three seats.

Entertainers Fail to Persuade

¶13. (U) Entertainment personalities flopped in both national and local races, indicating that voters are slowly discerning the reel

from real. One exceptions was movie actress and outgoing Lipa City Mayor Vilma Santos Recto -- wife of senatorial candidate Ralph Recto - who won her gubernatorial bid in Batangas Province. A big surprise was the defeat of featherweight boxing champion and national hero "Manny" Pacquiao for the Congressional seat in General Santos City.

Special Elections in Maguindanao

¶14. (SBU) Maguindanao Province in Mindanao was at the center of controversy over alleged fraud and irregularities in the May 14 elections. Amid allegations of widespread cheating, the COMELEC suspended the tabulation of certificates of canvas in the province. To date, the COMELEC has not counted the certificates of canvas from Maguindanao. According to National Movement for Free Elections Chairman Go, "we cannot even be sure that elections really took place in Maguindanao." Several teachers have anonymously provided evidence of alleged abuses that publicly cast doubt on the validity of these elections.

¶15. (SBU) Governor Andal "Andy" Ampatuan, Vice-Governor Sajid Ampatuan (Andal's son), Congressman Simeon Datumanong (Andal's nephew), and 21 out of 22 mayoral candidates in Maguindanao ran for office unopposed. According to a senior Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) official, no one "dared" to challenge Ampatuan and his handpicked candidates because "the word was out" in Maguindanao. He privately bemoaned that the "non-election" in Maguindanao had undermined the democratic process.

¶16. (SBU) Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita attributed Team Unity's supposed 12-0 win in Maguindanao to "strong support" from local officials and the failure of opposition candidates to campaign within the province. "How can you fault the people in that area if the other party has no machinery, and, in fact, does not have any candidate for mayor," Ermita told the press. "If you do not go there, if you are not seen there, chances are they might forget to vote for you," explained Ermita. However, COMELEC Commissioner and Task Force Maguindanao Chief Rene Sarmiento, who briefly headed an investigation of electoral fraud in the Ampatuan clan-dominated province, resigned from his special post on May 28 due to "health reasons." COMELEC Chairman Abalos on May 30 admitted publicly that the 12-0 TU results in Maguindanao were "statistically improbable" and ordered a recount at the municipal level.

Special Elections in Lanao del Sur Province

¶17. (U) After election workers refused to man their polling precincts on May 14 due to threats from rival political clans, the COMELEC declared a failure of elections in 13 towns in Lanao del Sur Province in Mindanao. COMELEC held special elections on May 26 in these towns, but election results have not yet arrived at the national canvassing board in Manila.

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